

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 ACDA-07 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01

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R 191145Z APR 76

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4648

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

CINCPAC

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 1387

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, MV

SUBJ: BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM RAF GAN: MALDIVIAN REACTION

1. SUMMARY: SENIOR MALDIVIAN OFFICIALS ARE DISTURBED OVER STATUS OF EMPLOYEES AND FACILITIES AT FORMER RAF STAGING FACILITY ON GAN ISLAND WHICH HAVE BECOME THEIR PROBLEM OVER THE BRITISH WITHDRAWAL MARCH 31. HOPES THAT BRITISH WOULD PROVIDE MONEY TO MAINTAIN OPERATION HAVE NOT BEEN REALIZED NOR DO PROSPECTS OF CONVERTING GAN INTO TOURIST COMPLEX APPEAR GOOD. PRESIDENT NASIR CLAIMED GOM CANNOT MAINTAIN BURDEN OVER TIME AND VICE PRESIDENT MANIKU NOTED THAT SOVIET UNION HAD EXPRESSED INTEREST IN GAN, PRESUMABLY FOR MILITARY PURPOSES. NEITHER NASIR NOR MANIK RULES OUT POSSIBILITY THAT SUCH USE MIGHT BE GRANTED. WE ARE NOT CERTAIN GOM WOULD IN FACT COME

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TO AGREEMENT WITH SOVIETS

BUT WE RECOMMEND WASHINGTON EXAMINE HOW SOVIET
MILITARY USE OF GAN MIGHT AFFECT US INTERESTS.
END SUMMARY.

2. DURING AMB VAN HOLLEN'S APRIL 14-15 FARE-
WELL VISIT TO MALDIVES, DISCUSSIONS WITH SENIOR MALDI-
VIANS BROUGHT OUT DEEP CONCERN OVER PROBLEMS ARISING
FROM MARCH 31 FINAL BRITISH WITHDRAWAL FROM RAF GAN.
AT START OF AMBS CALL ON PRESIDENT NASIR,
PRESIDENT RAISED GAN NOTINT THAT ALTHOUGH OTHER ECONOMIC
PROSPECTS FOR HIS COUNTRY HAD IMPROVED, GAN HAD BECOME
DIFFICULT PROBLEM. HE SAID GOM HAD TO MAINTAIN WORK
FORCE OF 140 MEN MERELY TO KEEP FACILITIES IN WORKING
ORDER WITH NO RETURN TO MALDIVIANS. NASIR MENTIONED
POSSIBILITY THAT GAN MIGHT BE TURNED INTO TOURIST
COMPLEX BUT THEN NOTED THAT BUSINESS WOULD BE SEASONAL,
WOULD REQUIRE LARGE ANNUAL INVESTMENT FOR LIMITED
RETURNS DURING TOURIST MONTHS AND HE DOUBTED WHETHER
CHARTER TOUR OPERATORS WOULD BE WILLING TO COVER YEARLY
COSTS. ONLY SOLUTION, ACCORDING TO NASIR WAS TO WORK
OUT SOME TYPE OF AGREEMENT EITHER WITH COMMERCIAL ORGANI-
ZATIONS OR WITH SOME OTHER COUNTRY. IN REPLY TO
AMBASSADOR'S DIRECT QUERY WHETHER AGREEMENTS WOULD BE IN
TOURIST COMPLEX RATHER THAN MILITARY USE, PRESIDENT WAS
NON-COMMITAL AND DID NOT RULE OUT THIRD COUNTRY USE
FOR MILITARY PURPOSES.

3. SUBJECT OF GAN AROSE AGAIN DURING AMBASSADOR'S
CALL ON VICE PRESIDENT ALI MANIKU WHO HAS BEEN
CARRYING ON NEGOTIATIONS WITH BRITISH REGARDING GAN
WITHDRAWAL. MANIKU STATED PROBLEM IN THESE TERMS:
ALTHOUGH BRITISH HAD LEFT ASSETS ON GAN IN FORM
OF FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT WORTH OVER 11 MILLION
POUNDS, GOM WILL HAVE TO SPEND 46,000 POUNDS PER YEAR
TO MAINTAIN FACILITIES IN RUNNING ORDER, COST WHICH GOM
CANNOT SUSTAIN OVER TIME. TALKS HAVE BEEN HELD WITH
VARIOUS GROUPS WITH VIEW TO DEVELOPING GAN AS TOURIST
COMPLEX, BUT NOTHING CONCRETE HAS COME OUT OF THEM.
MANIKU INSISTED THAT PRESENT SITUATION COULD NOT
CONTINUE. HE SAID MALDIVIANS WOULD PREFER NOT TO
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HAVE TO TURN TO ANY MAJOR POWER TO SOLVE GAN PROBLEM, HOWEVER,
SOME WAY MUST BE FOUND TO MAINTAIN GAN AT NO COST TO GOM, AND
EMPLOYMENT FOUND FOR TRAINED
LABOR FROM RAF GAN WHO WERE OUT OF WORK AND WHO HAD
BEEN USED TO HIGHER BRITISH SALARIES. MAINKU IMPLIED
BRITISH HAD LEFT WORKERS IN LURCH AND HE MADE IT CLEAR
THAT GOM NO LONGER CONSIDERS DEFENCE TREATY WITH HMG
VALID.

4. WHEN ASKED BY AMBASSADOR WHETHER GAN'S USE FOR OTHER THAN FOR TOURIST PURPOSES WOULD BE CONTEMPLATED, MANIKU SAID GOM WOULD HAVE TO SOLVE PROBLEM IN WHATEVER WAY WAS OPEN TO IT. IF BRITISH/ AMERICAN REFUSED TO WMCEPT RESPONSIBILITY FOR MAINTAINING GAN, AND IF NO GROUP WAS INTERESTED IN DEVELOPING GAN AS TOURIST COMPLEX, THEN GOM WOULD HAVE TO TURN TO WHOMEVER MIGHT HELP. HE SAID SOVIETS HAD EXPRESSED INTEREST IN GAN BUT DID NOT GO INTO DETAILS. WPRN AMBASSADOR SUGGESTED INDIANS MIGHT NOT NECESSARILY BE PLEASED WITH SOVIET USE, MANIKU REITERATED THAT SOVIETS HAD SHOWN INTEREST AND SUGGESTED THAT INDIANS, WHO HE PICTURED AS BEING HEAVILY UNDER SOVIET INFLUENCE, MIGHT BE PLANNING SOME SORT OF JOINT USE WITH SOVIETS.

5. COMMENT: PROBLEM OF WHAT TO DO WITH GAN IS OBVIOUSLY WEIGHING HEAVILY ON MINDS OF MANY SENIOR MALDIVIANS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO JUDGE WHETHER THEY WOULD, IN FACT, TURN GAN OVER TO RUSSIANS, ALTHOUGH NEITHER PRESIDENT NASIR NOR VICE PRESIDENT MANIKU WOULD RULE OUT THIS POSSIBILITY. IN VIEW MALDIVIAN REQUIREMENT THAT PROGRAMS OR PROJECTS SHOULD PAY THEIR OWN WAY, GOM MIGHT WELL BE TEMPTED TO ENTER ARRANGEMENT WITH SOVIETS, INDIANS OR OTHERS FOR MILITARY USE OF GAN FACILITIES IF IT FELT PRICE WAS RIGHT.

5. ACTION RECOMMENDED: WE RECOMMEND THAT WASHINGTON AGENCIES PROMPLTY TAKE ANOTHER CLOSE LOOK AT GAN AND CONSIDER A) DEGREE TO WHICH ITS USE BY UNFRIENDLY POWER WOULD ADVERSELY AFFECT US INTERESTS, PARTICULARLY WITH REFERENCE TO ITS PROXIMITY TO DIEGO GARCIA AND US OBJECTIVES IN INDIAN OCEAN
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AND B) ALTERNATIVES FOR US POLICY.
VAN HOLLEN

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